

“How to Develop Good Relationships Between Teachers and Pupils at Grade I and Grade II of Primary Schools in Sri Lanka”

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Summary of the project

The Sri Lankan country team has been implementing a pilot project to educate Teacher Trainees on children’s rights in Hapitigama National College of Education (Sri Lanka), with a close collaboration with Lund University (Sweden) and the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida). Currently in Sri Lanka, children of various races, religions and ethnic groupings receive education here in the same classrooms. In that regard, there is a need for the teacher to show concern to ensure that the rights of the children are equally safeguarded against the existing state of social turmoil prevailing in the country.

In particular, a good interpersonal relationship developed between the teacher and the pupil is of an extreme importance. To achieve this objective, the team has launched the pilot project with the collaboration of the National Colleges of Education, which plays a significant role in the implementation of pre-service teacher education programmes. Therefore, the pre-service teacher education programmes are very important in forming teachers with a higher standard of professional development. Students and teachers together become a powerful force promoting awareness in the community.

Impact on the personal and professional levels

I was able to participate to both the theoretical and practical parts of the ‘Child Rights, Classroom and School Management’ training programme that were conducted by Lund University (Sweden) in 2006. In my opinion, I gained some considerable knowledge on children’s rights in the context of different social and political settings. Particularly, learning the meaning of the term ‘change agent’. I also acquired some new knowledge on different issues related to the subject of child rights, classroom and school management. The content of the course on one side, and the efforts of the academic and coordinating staff on the other side, gave us an optimal implementation model of the program. It will probably benefit me in the future for the coordination of programmes.

The review of the role of the teacher as a change agent modified my personal life as an individual in society. Furthermore, I would like to mention that the training gave me the ability to guard the rights of children that are around me. In other words, it can be said that I am contributing with my knowledge to provide informal education to those in my surroundings.

Apart from that, as a social worker, I can transfer my knowledge and experiences to my colleagues in my workplace. In that regard, I shared with the other programme members not only my experience regarding the situation of children in South African schools, but also my knowledge of their policies and approach to education.

Furthermore, the exchange of information with friends from other countries was extremely beneficial to me and I was able to apply it in my own country. I have formed a small cluster in charge of promoting children's rights through the activities of my institute. Since the end of last year, the cluster has been discussing on a daily basis the situation of children's rights in our society and it also informs authorities, such as the National Child Protection Authority (NCPA), the Human Rights Commission (HRC) and the Institute of Human Rights (IHR) in Sri Lanka.

Impact on the organizational level

The Sri Lankan country team has implemented their pilot project in Hapitigama National College of Education where the teacher trainees are formed in order to be appointed to National Schools in Sri Lanka. There are seventeen National Colleges Of Education (NCOEs), which have conducted various pre-service teacher-training courses. The course was composed of two theoretical years and one year of internship in the governmental schools. As to the Hapitigama NCOE for instance, there were 300 teacher trainees in 2006. Among them, 30 were selected for this pilot project on the basis of several criteria. The first criterion is related to time allocation and selected subjects. According to the data collected, 30 students were enrolled in primary education training and some of them were following the 'special education' specialization. It is important to notice that it is at the primary education and special education levels that the majority of children's rights abuses are reported; sadly, not enough attention is given to this problem in the Sri Lankan educational system. Therefore, the country team realized that more attention must be paid to these areas in order to achieve better results with regards to primary education in Sri Lanka.

After several series of discussions with the NCOE academic staff (including the president, the vice-president, section heads and others), the country team made an action plan which included both theoretical and practical knowledge of the CRC. Those who completed the training were directed to a teaching practice during their 'teaching block' and an internship that lasted for ten academic months.

- The role of the young change agents is very important at the grass-route level, because each of the teachers trainees will be teaching in 30 different schools situated in the country side of Sri Lanka. According to their

request, they are going to form 30 CRC clubs, which include students, parents and section head teachers in these 30 schools, with the objective of promoting and protecting the CRC. In the meantime, those clubs will act as vigilant committees that monitor CRC violations in the school environment. The leading role of the committee will be played by young change agents who obtained the CRC training. In that sense, it will have an effect on at least 30% to 50% of the students of each of the 30 schools.

- The project had a direct impact on the academic staff of Hapitigama NCOE. They also decided to continue this project for the rest of the teacher trainees in the specific fiscal year by giving them two days of full training with the support of the country team. In addition to that, the staff has determined to take into considering the CRC in their evaluations at the college level. Furthermore, they have introduced to the rest of the NCOEs the pilot project and its values in terms of teaching.

Impact on the country level

The pilot project has been discussed on the national level since its practical application was accomplished. In that sense, the Hapitigama NCOE and the National Institute of Education (NIE) have formed a working committee to discuss the value and effects of the project. This discussion has been continuous since the fourth quarter of the year 2007. It seems that there is a green light to integrate some criteria and specific lessons on the CRC into the NCOE's professional subjects and teaching practices.

The country team intends to implement the steps explained below in order to protect and promote the CRC in the entire school system in Sri Lanka, with the collaboration of other national organs that promote education in Sri Lanka.

- To include the CRC norms and values in the NCOE Teacher Education Curricula and to settle a national mechanism for the implementation of the CRC in schools in Sri Lanka.
- To launch the pilot project on awareness training about the CRC for the primary education sector teachers, including all pre-service teacher trainees in the western province. Both Sinhala and Tamil medium teacher trainees will be targeted. It is expected to have joint collaboration with NIE, Sida-Sri Lanka, other development agencies and previous CRC country teams. The project will be coordinated by 'Loving Friends International.'